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The Bush Appointment

"IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS," the Rockefeller CIA commission reported to President Ford a few months ago, "the proper functioning of the Agency must depend in large part on the character of the Director of Central Intelligence." The report went on: "The best assurance against misuse of the Agency lies in the appointment to that position of persons with the judgment, courage, and independence to resist improper pressure and importuning, whether from the White House, within the Agency or elsewhere." That was good advice, taking into proper account the country's need—and CIA's need—to restore both the fact and the appearance of probity to an agency badly scarred by the Cold War and Watergate.

Mr. Ford, however, has rejected this advice. In nominating George Bush, a pleasant and able Republican politician currently serving as ambassador in Peking, he has selected a man who, for all of his qualities, would be on very few lists of "persons with the judgment, courage, and independence to resist improper pressure and importuning." Mr. Bush has been a loyal servant of several presidents—and of the Republican Party. He apparently would like to be Vice President, a post which is almost entirely the President's to bestow or withhold. On the basis of his record as Ambassador to the U.N., there are doubtless a great many jobs in government which he could do very well, but brief service as Director of Central Intelligence is not among them.

In fact, the next Director must do more than project an image of independence. He must join in the reshaping of the agency's mission, organization and relationship to Congress—matters of common concern to the Rockefeller Commission and to the Senate and House intelligence inquiries. If it is necessary to ask whether a "political" CIA director could be expected to give his best judgment on intelligence issues with political implications, then one must also ask if a transient director would be around long enough to help make the necessary coming reforms. The post should not be regarded as a political parking spot. There is serious work to be done.

So Mr. Ford has a problem, or several problems. No sooner had he announced his lack of confidence in William Colby, the current director, than he was forced to ask him to stay on to get the agency through the congressional investigations. Mr. Bush, meanwhile, faces a delay of some months in his confirmation hearings, and possible rejection. Granted, filling high appointive posts in the last year of an administration is always tough. Mr. Ford still would have done better to let Mr. Colby stay through the investigations, and then to have sought a non-political worthy to take the helm at least until the elections. We mean no offense to Mr. Bush. But we fail to see why the Senate would wish to confirm him—or why, for that matter, he would want the job.